

Congress approves import ban targeting forced labor in China

WASHINGTON (AP) — Senators gave final congressional approval Thursday to a bill barring imports from China's Xinjiang region unless businesses can prove they were produced without forced labor, overcoming initial hesitation from the White House and what supporters said was opposition from corporations. The measure is the latest in a series intensifying U.S. penalties over China's alleged systemic and widespread abuse of ethnic and religious minorities in the western region, especially Xinjiang's predominantly Muslim Uyghurs. The Biden administration also announced new sanctions Thursday targeting several Chinese biotech and surveillance companies, a leading drone manufacturer and government entities for their actions in Xinjiang.

The Senate vote sends the bill to President Joe Biden. Press secretary Jen Psaki said this week that Biden supported the measure, after months of the White House declining to take a public stand on an earlier version of the legislation.



President Joe Biden listens as he meets virtually with Chinese President Xi Jinping from the Roosevelt Room of the White House in Washington, Nov. 15, 2021.

Associated Press
Continued on next page

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Continued from Front

The United States says China is committing genocide in its treatment of the Uyghurs. That includes widespread reports by rights groups and journalists of forced sterilization and large detention camps where many Uyghurs allegedly are compelled to work in factories.

China denies any abuses. It says the steps it has taken are necessary to combat terrorism and a separatist movement.

The U.S. cites raw cotton, gloves, tomato products, silicon and viscose, fishing gear and a range of components in solar energy as among goods alleged to have been produced with the help of the forced labor.

Xinjiang is a resource-rich mining region, important for agricultural production, and home to a booming industrial sector. Detainees also are moved outside Xinjiang and put to work in factories, including those in the apparel and textiles, electronics, solar energy and automotive sectors, the U.S. says.

"Many companies have already taken steps to clean up their supply chains. And, frankly, they should have no concerns about this law," Sen. Marco Rubio, the Florida Republican who introduced the earlier version of the legislation with Oregon Democratic Sen. Jeff Merkley, said in a statement.

"For those who have not done that, they'll no longer be able to continue to make Americans — every one of us, frankly — unwitting accomplices in the atrocities, in the genocide," Rubio said.

As in the House earlier this week, the compromise version passed the Senate with overwhelming approval from Democrats and Republicans. The swift passage came after what



Demonstrators hold placards and flags during a demonstration outside the Chinese embassy in London on Dec. 9, 2021.

Associated Press

supporters said was off-stage opposition from corporations with manufacturing links to China, although there was little to no overt opposition.

Apple's lobbying firm lobbied on Apple's behalf, a federal disclosure form shows. Apple, like Nike and other corporations with work done in China, says it has found no sign of forced labor from Xinjiang in its manufacturing or supply chain.

Some Uyghur rights advocates and others said they had also feared private opposition from within the Biden administration as it sought cooperation from the Chinese on climate change and other issues. Psaki, in her statement Tuesday night, noted export controls and import restrictions, sanctions, diplomatic initiatives and other measures the Biden administration had already taken targeting forced labor from Xinjiang.

Advocates credited unrelenting support from rights

groups and lawmakers, including statements from House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, with helping the bill prevail.

With the legislation, sanctions and months of other new measures, "the United States is way ahead" of the international community on confronting China on abuses of Uyghurs, said Nury Turkel, a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute and vice chair of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom.

How can anyone get China to change "without going after the most important thing to the Chinese government, which is their economic interest?" asked Turkel, who praised Congress — but not the administration — for what he called coherent messaging on the matter.

The legislation requires government agencies to expand their monitoring of the use of forced labor by China's ethnic minorities. Crucially, it creates a presumption that goods com-

ing from Xinjiang are made with forced labor. Businesses will have to prove that forced labor, including by workers transferred from Xinjiang, played no part in a product to bring it into the United States.

Meanwhile, the Commerce Department announced new penalties targeting China's Academy of Military Medical Sciences and its 11 research institutes that focus on using biotechnology to support the Chinese military.

The move bars American companies from selling goods and technologies to the entities without a license.

China "is choosing to use these technologies to pursue control over its people and its repression of members of ethnic and religious minority groups," Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo said in a statement. Separately, the Treasury Department announced it was placing DJI, the world's largest drone manufacturer, and seven other Chinese companies on an investment blacklist over their alleged involvement in biometric surveillance and tracking of Uyghurs.

The measure means individuals in the U.S. will be prohibited from purchasing or selling publicly traded securities connected with

the companies.

DJI dominates the global market for the small, low-altitude drones used by hobbyists, photographers and many businesses and governments.

Other companies added to the Treasury blacklist are image-recognition software firm Megvii, super-computer manufacturer Dawning Information Industry, facial recognition specialist CloudWalk Technology, cybersecurity group Xiamen Meiya Pico, artificial intelligence company Yitu Technology and cloud computing firms Leon Technology and NetPosa Technologies.

U.S. intelligence has established that Beijing has set up a high-tech surveillance system across Xinjiang that uses biometric facial recognition and has collected DNA samples from all residents, ages 12 to 65, as part of a systematic effort to suppress Uyghurs, according to a senior administration official who briefed reporters on the sanctions on the condition of anonymity.

The Commerce Department said multiple federal agencies determined that the Chinese academy and research institutes "use biotechnology processes to support Chinese military end uses and end users, to include purported brain-control weaponry."

The White House announced last week it would stage a diplomatic boycott of the upcoming Winter Olympics in Beijing, citing China's "egregious human rights abuses and atrocities in Xinjiang."

U.S. athletes will compete but Biden will not send the usual contingent of dignitaries.

The Chinese Embassy in Washington did not immediately respond to a call and email seeking comment.

Rights groups note prison labor has long been a part of the U.S. economy, with inmates producing goods and providing services such as call centers for what is typically reduced pay. Opponents say the system disproportionately profits off the labor of incarcerated Black Americans. □



U.S. pulls out of settlement talks in family separation suits

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. government withdrew Thursday from settlement negotiations to end lawsuits filed on behalf of parents and children who were forcibly separated under the Trump administration's zero-tolerance border policy.

Justice Department officials informed lawyers for the plaintiffs in a conference call that the government would not offer a global settlement in family separation cases and will defend each one in court, said Lee Gelernt, an attorney with the American Civil Liberties Union, which filed one of the suits.

The decision comes after eight months of negotiations and weeks after reports of a proposed settlement that would include payments of several hundred thousand dollars to each family sparked outrage among Biden administration critics in Congress and elsewhere.

Gelernt said no explanation was given. "It's hard to understand DOJ's decision



Migrant teens eat lunch at a "tender-age" facility for babies, children and teens, in Texas' Rio Grande Valley, on Aug. 29, 2019, in San Benito, Texas.

Associated Press

other than it was influenced by political considerations," he said.

The Justice Department suggested in a statement that settlements were still possible despite its withdrawal from the talks.

"While the parties have

been unable to reach a global settlement agreement at this time, we remain committed to engaging with the plaintiffs and to bringing justice to the victims of this abhorrent policy," it said.

About 5,500 children were

forcibly removed from their parents in 2018 under President Donald Trump as his administration sought to stop an increase in people crossing the U.S.-Mexico border with criminal prosecutions, even if the migrants were presenting

themselves to authorities to seek asylum as permitted under the law.

The parents of hundreds of children have still not been located.

Trump halted the practice in June 2018 amid widespread outrage, including from many Republicans, just six days before a judge ordered an end to the program in response to a lawsuit filed by the ACLU.

The settlement talks with the ACLU and attorneys for hundreds of other plaintiffs had proceeded quietly until The Wall Street Journal reported in October that the Justice Department was considering paying about \$450,000 to each person affected by the policy. The Associated Press later confirmed the figure had been under consideration.

The suits filed under the Federal Tort Claims Act are intended in part to help compensate families for the psychological damage of the separation, but critics argue it would reward people for illegally crossing the border. □

House report finds lax federal oversight of Trump's DC hotel

By **BERNARD CONDON**

NEW YORK (AP) — The federal agency overseeing the lease of the luxury hotel that Donald Trump's family company runs in the nation's capital failed to carry out its basic responsibilities because it never tracked the millions of dollars from foreign governments patronizing the hotel or examined the origins of a \$75 million loan that helped keep its doors open, according to a congressional report Thursday.

The General Services Administration "washed its hands of responsibility" to review how much the Trump International Hotel was profiting during his presidency from foreign government payments in possible violation of the Constitution's emoluments clause, according to the report by the Democratic-led House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. That provision bars

presidents from receiving gifts or payments from foreign governments.

The committee said the GSA "ignored critical ethical and constitutional issues involving then-President Trump's financial interest in the hotel."

Neither the agency nor the Trump Organization responded to requests for comment.

In 2019, the agency's internal watchdog had criticized the GSA for failing in crucial oversight of the property.

The committee, led by Rep. Peter DeFazio of Oregon, also said the GSA did not monitor spending at the hotel by state and local public officials that could have violated a separate constitutional provision barring domestic government payments.

The report also faulted the agency for not investigating the origins of a \$75 million loan to the hotel, a

possible source of conflict between Trump's private financial interests and his public role as president. The loan, according to the report, came from the Trump family.

A separate report by the House Oversight and Reform Committee in October said Trump had misled the public on the hotel's finances. The committee released financial statements showing the hotel had lost more than \$70 million while he was president.

Ethics lawyers who have criticized Trump's decision to not divest himself of the Washington hotel and other financial interests before becoming president in January 2017 have repeatedly faulted the GSA for not canceling the family's hotel lease despite language in the contract barring government officials from profiting from the property. The hotel occupies the government-owned Old Post



A passerby takes a look at the front of The Trump International Hotel on March 4, 2021, in Washington.

Associated Press

Office building. A federal lease with the Trump family runs nearly 100 years, with extensions.

The GSA has said that its review showed Trump was in "full compliance" of the lease because profits from the hotel were not going directly to Trump while he was president. Trump put his assets in a trust controlled by his two adult sons and

a longtime executive before his term began.

Separately, the GSA confirmed this week that the Trump Organization had given formal notice that it had reached agreement to sell the hotel lease for \$375 million to CGI Merchant Group, a Miami-based real estate investment firm. The GSA needs to sign off on any purchase. □

At least 5 dead as Midwest rocked by hurricane-force winds

By **MARGERY A. BECK and MARGARET STAFFORD**

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — At least five people died as a powerful and extremely unusual storm system swept across the Great Plains and Midwest amid unseasonably warm temperatures, spawning hurricane-force winds and possible tornadoes in Nebraska, Iowa and Minnesota.

In southeastern Minnesota, Olmsted County Sheriff's Lt. Lee Rossman said a 65-year-old man was killed Wednesday night when a 40-foot tree blew onto him outside his home. In southwestern Kansas, blinding dust kicked up by the storms Wednesday led to two separate crashes that killed three people, Kansas Highway Patrol trooper Mike Racy said. And in eastern Iowa, a semitrailer was struck by high winds and rolled onto its side Wednesday evening, killing the driver, the Iowa State Patrol confirmed.

The storm shifted north of the Great Lakes into Canada on Thursday, with high winds, snow and hazardous conditions continuing in the upper Great Lakes region, the National Weather Service said. More than



A grain trailer sits among the debris of a farm building damaged by strong wind gusts in Jefferson, Iowa, on Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021.

Associated Press

190,000 homes and businesses remained without electricity Thursday afternoon in Michigan, Wisconsin, Iowa and Kansas, according to poweroutage.us, which tracks utility reports.

A tornado was reported in southern Minnesota on Wednesday and, if confirmed, it would be the state's first on record in December. The small com-

munity of Hartland, Minnesota, might have been the hardest hit, with a reported 35 to 40 homes sustaining minor damage and a few businesses severely damaged, county Emergency Management Director Rich Hall said.

Losses also included livestock. Dozens of cows were electrocuted at a dairy farm after a power pole landed on a milking barn in

Newaygo County, in western Michigan. Tim Butler said his workers at the dairy survived the event, but at least 70 cows died. Dozens survived, but many were "hurt bad," Butler said.

The destructive weather system developed amid unprecedented warmth for December in the Plains and northern states. That included temperatures that rose to 70 degrees Fahrenheit

(21 degrees Celsius) across southwestern Wisconsin on Wednesday evening. The Weather Company historian Chris Burt compared the heat to that of a "warm July evening."

"I can say with some confidence that this event (the heat and tornadoes) is among the most (if not THE most) anomalous weather event ever on record for the Upper Midwest," Burt wrote in a Facebook post. The winds knocked down trees, tree limbs and nearly 150 power lines in northern and western Michigan's Lower Peninsula. In the western Michigan village of Fruitport, high winds peeled back a portion of Edgewood Elementary School's roof, leading officials to close all district schools Thursday.

There were more than 20 tornado reports Wednesday in the Plains states, scattered mostly through eastern Nebraska and Iowa, based on preliminary reports to the Storm Prediction Center. The storm system led to the most reports of hurricane-force wind gusts — 75 mph (120 kph) or higher — on any day in the U.S. since 2004, the center said. □

Florida condos should have frequent inspections, panel says



A Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation law enforcement boat patrols in the ocean in front of search and rescue efforts at the Champlain Towers South condo building, where scores of people remain missing almost a week after it partially collapsed, Wednesday, June 30, 2021, in Surfside, Fla.

Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — A Florida grand jury issued a lengthy list of recommendations Wednesday aimed at preventing another condominium collapse like the

one that killed 98 people in June, including earlier and more frequent inspections and better waterproofing. In its report on the Surfside collapse, the Miami-Dade

County Grand Jury called on state and local officials to require condominium towers to have an initial recertification inspection by an engineer between 10 and 15 years after their construction and every 10 years thereafter. Currently, Miami-Dade and neighboring Broward County require inspections at 40 years. Other Florida counties have no requirement.

Champlain Towers South, built in 1981, collapsed June 24 as its 40-year recertification was due. No cause of the collapse has been determined, but records show the building had significant structural damage in its underground parking garage. An engineer had already concluded that \$15 million of repairs would be required to bring

it up to code. Some of the damage at the oceanside building is believed to have come from saltwater in the air. The grand jury report laments that the state repealed a requirement imposed in 2008 requiring that all condo towers bigger than three stories be inspected every five years. The requirement was repealed two years after it was imposed because it was deemed too costly. "In hindsight, it would appear the Legislature's repeal of that statute was a huge mistake!" the report says.

Other recommendations include: — Requiring that condo towers be repainted and waterproofed every 10 years to prevent corrosion. — Having local governments increase the size of

their building departments, including by hiring more inspectors.

— Suspending for at least a year the licenses of engineers and architects who submit false or misleading recertification reports and barring their employers from doing such inspections for the same period. Requiring that a second offense result in a license revocation.

— Requiring architects and engineers who find severe structural damage during an inspection to report it to local officials within 24 hours and not just to the condo board.

— Requiring condo board owners to take courses on their role in overseeing building maintenance and effectively managing a building's finances. □

EU hopes to avoid Ukraine war with talks, sanctions threat

By **RAF CASERT**

BRUSSELS (AP) — European Union leaders on Thursday focused on preventing a Russian military invasion of neighboring Ukraine with threats of unprecedented sanctions for Moscow and the promise of diplomatic talks.

And on a day of diplomatic moves, Russia said it submitted draft documents to the United States outlining security arrangements that would preclude NATO's expansion to Ukraine.

A Russian military buildup on Ukraine's border took center stage at the summit of the EU's 27 leaders, coming on the heels of a plea from Ukraine's president for more sanctions to be imposed before instead of after any possible incursion.

Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda said the EU should not underestimate the threat Russia's troop buildup poses, adding that he sees Moscow's actions as creating the worst security situation since the collapse of the Soviet Union. "I'm talking not only about Ukraine," Nausėda said, stressing that NATO's eastern flank and the Baltic region should also be con-



From left, European Parliament President David Sassoli, Slovenia's Prime Minister Janez Jansa and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen during a signing ceremony of EU Legislative Priorities for 2022 on the sidelines of an EU Summit in Brussels, Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021.

Associated Press

cerned.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz warned Moscow not to cross any lines.

"The inviolability of borders is one of the very important foundations of peace in Europe and that we will all do everything together to ensure that this inviolability actually remains intact," Scholz said as he entered the one-day summit.

Many of the leaders said they looked toward diplomatic talks to stave off military action in Ukraine. Prime Minister Janez Jansa of Slovenia, which holds the EU's rotating presidency until the end of the year, suggested talks between France, Germany, Ukraine and Russia.

"Maybe there are some open channels for some se-

rious negotiations" over the coming days, Jansa said. Moscow denies that it has any plans to attack Ukraine, but did so in 2014 when it annexed the Crimean Peninsula. U.S. intelligence officials say Russia has moved 70,000 troops and is preparing for a possible invasion early next year.

"It is not normal for regular military exercises," Jansa

said, adding that there's no doubt that Russia is using its military might to put Ukraine under pressure.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy urged EU leaders late Wednesday to swiftly impose new sanctions on Russia before it invades his country, warning that acting after any conflict would be far too late.

Zelenskyy said Ukraine stands ready to enter into talks with Russia to ease tensions but that Russian President Vladimir Putin doesn't appear willing to come to the table at the moment.

France and Germany brokered a peace agreement in 2015 that helped end large-scale hostilities in eastern Ukraine, where Ukrainian forces have been fighting Russia-backed separatists since 2014.

But the conflict, which has left 14,000 dead, has simmered.

EU leaders are widely expected to approve on Thursday a draft summit conclusion, seen by The Associated Press, that warns that "any further military aggression against Ukraine will have massive consequences and severe cost in response." □

Christian officials accuse Israel of holiday discrimination

JERUSALEM (AP) — A spokesman for Christian churches in the Holy Land on Wednesday accused Israel of discriminating against Christian tourists during the normally busy Christmas holiday season. Israel last month closed its borders to foreign tourists in response to the outbreak of the omicron coronavirus variant.

But this week, Israeli officials decided to make an exception for "Birthright," a popular program that provides free trips to Israel to young Jews from around the world.

Groups from the United States are expected to arrive next week, with participants all fully vaccinated and remaining in small

"capsules."

For now, restrictions remain in effect for other foreign tourists, including Christian pilgrims who traditionally have flocked to sites like Jerusalem, Nazareth and Bethlehem, the biblical town in the occupied West Bank revered by Christians as the birthplace of Jesus. Wadie Abunassar, a spokesman and adviser to churches in the Holy Land, said various denominations were upset over the selective treatment and he accused Israel of discriminating against Christian pilgrims.

"Racist discrimination should never be accepted in any way!" he wrote on Facebook. "I urge the Israeli authorities to treat

all those who want to visit the country equally without any discrimination between religion."

An official with the Catholic Church said church officials were shocked and angry by the Israeli decision. He said the church, along with other denominations, have appealed to Israel's Tourism Ministry to allow Christian pilgrims to come for the holiday. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to the media.

Israel's Interior Ministry, which oversees entrance policies at the country's borders, said the policy remains not to allow foreigners into Israel.

But it said a number of ex-



Fireworks burst over the Church of the Nativity in Manger Square in the West Bank town of Bethlehem during the lighting of the Christmas tree, Saturday, Dec. 4, 2021.

Associated Press

ceptions have been made, including a "specific" decision for the Birthright program. It said officials would be discussing the possibility of other exceptions in the near future, but gave no further details.

The travel ban has crushed the tourism industry in Israel,

and officials in Bethlehem, whose economy relies heavily on Christmas visitors, say the restrictions have ruined the holiday season for a second straight year.

The West Bank does not have its own airport and most foreign visitors enter from Israel. □

Rescuers battle strong typhoon lashing southern Philippines

By JIM GOMEZ

Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines (AP)

— A powerful typhoon slammed into the south-eastern Philippines on Thursday, toppling trees, ripping tin roofs and knocking down power as it blew across island provinces where nearly 100,000 people have been evacuated. Coast guard personnel were rescuing residents stranded by chest-deep waters in a southern province, where pounding rains swamped villages in brownish water. In southern Cagayan de Oro city, footage showed two rescuers struggling to keep a month-old baby inside a laundry basin above the waters and shielded from the wind and rain with an umbrella. Forecasters said Typhoon Rai further strengthened with sustained winds of 195 kilometers (121 miles) per hour and gusts of up to 270 kph (168 mph) as it blew from the Pacific Ocean into the Siargao Islands. There were no immediate reports of casualties or major damage. "I'm scared and praying here in my house that this stops now. The wind out-



In this handout photo provided by the Philippine Coast Guard, rescuers assist residents over floodwaters caused by Typhoon Rai as they are evacuated to higher ground in Cagayan de Oro City, southern Philippines, Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021.

Associated Press

side is so strong it's cutting down trees," Teresa Lzano, a resident of eastern MacArthur town in coastal Leyte province, told DZMM radio by telephone, adding roofs of nearby houses were damaged and that her farming village had lost power. Disaster-response officials said about 10,000 villages lie in the projected path of the typhoon, which has

a 400-kilometer (248-mile)-wide rain band and is one of the strongest to hit the country this year. The coast guard said it has grounded all vessels, stranding nearly 4,000 passengers and ferry and cargo ship workers in dozens of southern and central ports. Several mostly domestic flights have been canceled and schools and workplaces were shut in the

most vulnerable areas. More than 98,000 people have been evacuated to safety, the government's disaster-response agency said. Crowding in evacuation centers was complicating efforts to keep people safely distanced after authorities detected the country's first infections caused by the omicron variant of the coronavirus. Intensified vaccinations

were also halted in provinces likely to experience stormy weather. The Philippines is among the hardest-hit in South-east Asia by the pandemic, with confirmed infections of more than 2.8 million and more than 50,000 deaths. Quarantine restrictions have been eased and more businesses have been allowed to reopen in recent weeks after an intensified vaccination campaign helped reduce infections to a few hundred from more than 26,000 in September. The detection of the omicron cases this week, however, has set off the alarm and the government renewed calls for people to avoid crowds and get vaccinated immediately. Gov. Ben Evardone of Eastern Samar province said he suspended vaccinations in his region of nearly half a million people due to the typhoon. More than 70% of villagers in the province have gotten at least one shot, and Evardone expressed concern because some vaccines stored in Eastern Samar will expire in a few months. □

Taiwan's Tsai urges unity against rising authoritarianism



In this photo released by the Taiwan Presidential Office, Taiwan president Tsai Ing-wen, right, greets Francois de Rugy, the head of the Taiwan Friendship group in the National Assembly, the lower house of France's Parliament, during a visit at the Presidential Office in Taipei, Taiwan, Dec. 16, 2021.

Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — Addressing a group of visiting French lawmakers, Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen called Wednesday for greater unity among democratic nations in the face of rising authoritarianism.

Tsai also said the self-governing island republic would take on greater responsibilities to contribute to regional and global peace and stability. "Democratic allies should strengthen cooperation

when facing challenges such as swift changes in international affairs and expansion of authoritarianism," Tsai said during the meeting at the Presidential Office Building. "Taiwan will take on its responsibilities in the international society and expects to contribute more to the Indo-Pacific region's peace and stability, as well as the world's prosperity and development, along with France and other like-minded partners in the European Union," she said. The visit by the six members of the French National Assembly offers a valuable opportunity for Tsai to address an international political audience in the face of China's efforts to isolate the island it claims as its own territory with no right to dip-

lomatic recognition. Chinese pressure has reduced the number of Taiwan's diplomatic allies to just 14. Francois de Rugy, who heads the France-Taiwan Parliamentary Friendship Group, said the French government had been positive about moves to strengthen ties between the sides. He presented Tsai with a copy of a resolution overwhelmingly adopted last month by the Assembly supporting Taiwan's participation in international bodies such as the International Civil Aviation Organization, Interpol, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the World Health Assembly. The National Assembly aims to "encourage a constructive regional dialogue in order to ensure peace and

dialogue over the Taiwan Strait," de Rugy told Tsai. The French delegation is the second to visit Taiwan in recent months, following one led by Sen. Alain Richard in October, during which they met with Tsai, Taiwanese economic and health officials and the Mainland Affairs Council overseeing exchanges with China that have been all but suspended by Beijing. China sought to have that visit called off, despite it being part of regular parliamentary exchanges that had been ongoing for years. Despite Chinese pressure, Taiwan has been stepping up exchanges with countries that don't officially recognize it as a country, often bringing a furious response from Beijing. □

Jittery Ukrainian villagers 'fear that a big war will start'

By **INNA VARENYTSIA and YURAS KARMANAU NEVELSKE, Ukraine (AP)**

— Liudmyla Momot wipes away tears as she searches for clothes and household items to salvage from the ruins of her home that was shelled by Russia-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine.

Her village of Nevelske, northwest of the rebel-held city of Donetsk, is only about 3 kilometers (2 miles) from the line of contact between the separatists and the Ukrainian military and has been emptied of all but five people.

Small arms fire frequently is heard in the daytime, giving way to the booms of light artillery and mortar shelling after dusk.

With the bloody conflict now more than seven years old, there are fears in Ukraine and the West that a buildup of armed forces on Russia's side of the border could lead to an invasion or the resumption of full-scale hostilities.

Rebels targeted Nevelske with shelling twice in the last month, damaging or destroying 16 of the vil-



Liudmyla Momot weeps as she searches for any still-usable items Friday, Dec. 10, 2021, in the debris of her house in the village of Nevelske in eastern Ukraine, that was struck by a mortar shell fired by Russia-backed separatists.

Associated Press

lage's 50 houses and rattling the handful of nervous residents who remain.

"The worse Ukraine-Russia relations are, the more we simple people are suffering," said 68-year-old Momot, who has worked at a dairy farm all her life.

Now with no home, "who could have imagined that? I was preparing for the win-

ter, stocking up coal and firewood."

After the shell hit her house, Momot fled to a nearby settlement where her son lives. But the anxiety has followed her there.

"We fear that a big war will start. People are scared and packed up their bags," said Momot, who collected some blankets, warm

clothes and other items in the debris.

The conflict in the eastern industrial heartland known as the Donbas erupted in April 2014, weeks after Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula following the ouster of Ukraine's Moscow-friendly former president. Ukraine and the West have accused Russia of support-

ing the rebels with troops and weapons, but Moscow says that Russians who joined the fight were volunteers acting on their own.

More than 14,000 people have been killed in fighting that has driven more than 2 million people from their homes in the east.

When the conflict began, Nevelske had a population of 286. Now, the five older people who remain in the ruined village collect rainwater for drinking and cooking. Between shipments of humanitarian aid, they rely on eating stale bread.

"We have grown accustomed to the shelling," said 84-year-old Halyna Moroka, who has stayed in Nevelske with her disabled son. A 2015 peace agreement brokered by France and Germany ended large-scale battles, but frequent skirmishes have continued. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, which monitors the shaky cease-fire, has reported an increasing number of such incidents, with both sides trading the blame for truce violations. □

All from U.S. missionary group freed in Haiti, police say

By **EVENS SANON and PETER SMITH**

Associated Press

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP)

— The remaining members of a U.S. missionary group who were kidnapped two months ago in Haiti have been freed, Haitian police and the group said Thursday.

The spokesman for Haiti's National Police, Gary Desrosiers, confirmed to The Associated Press that the hostages had been released, but did not immediately provide additional details.

"We glorify God for answered prayer — the remaining 12 hostages are FREE!" Christian Aid Ministries said in a statement. "Join us in praising God that all 17 of our loved ones are now safe."

The Ohio-based group said it hopes to provide more information later.

"We're feeling great," said Ron Marks, minister at Hart Dunkard Brethren Church in Hart, Michigan, whose members were among the hostages.

Carleton Horst, a member of the Hart congregation, said church members received a text message Thursday morning from "someone connected to the situation" that all of the hostages had been released.

A mother and four of her children who belong to the church were among the hostages. Horst, who is friends with the family, said the church is rejoicing and he's "elated that that portion of things is finally over, just praise the Lord for that." The missionaries were kidnapped by the 400 Mawozo gang on Oct. 16. There were five children in the group of 16 U.S. citi-

zens and one Canadian, including an 8-month-old. Their Haitian driver also was abducted, according to a local human rights organization.

Two of the hostages were released in November, and three more earlier this month. They were not identified, but members of the Hart congregation told local media in Michigan that two were from Hart.

In addition to Michigan, the hostages are from Wisconsin, Ohio, Tennessee, Pennsylvania, Oregon and Ontario, Canada, according to the missionary group.

"Today is the day we have been hoping for, praying for, and working so hard to achieve," said Congressman Bill Huizenga, whose western Michigan congressional district includes Hart. "I want to thank members of the hostage negotiation



Workers ride out of the gate of the Christian Aid Ministries headquarters in Titanyen, north of Port-au-Prince, Haiti, Monday, Dec. 6, 2021.

Associated Press

team for their diligence in securing the safe release of all the hostages. This is a great day for families in Michigan and across the nation who have been worried about the safety of their loved ones," Huizenga said.

The leader of the 400 Mawozo gang had threatened to kill the hostages unless his demands were met. Authorities have said the gang was demanding \$1 million per person, although it wasn't clear if that included the children. □

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Bohemian Restaurant & Bar, The Story: French Nomads in Culinary Avant-Garde

Like nomads travel from place to place to find fresh pasture for their livestock, the Nataf family –father Victor with sons David and Gregory - faithfully followed their nose for good food. As young boys, they indulged in their grandparent's culinary joie-de-vivre in the South of France. Ticked by the palette of excellent dishes prepared in their mid-seventies' restaurant in the Alps of France and filled with exquisite taste of their other restaurants in the beautiful island of Porquerolles near St Tropez that made it to a ranking of 13/20 in the Gault Millau restaurant grading. To the Natafs, food is a bohemian experience_ unconventional, eclectic and off the beaten track. Welcome to Bohemian Aruba!

A Grande entrée through a huge, wooden, Moroccan-style door takes you into a foodies Garden of Eden. Big trees stand tall and proudly, lit with

hanging lanterns creating a green and romantic lush paradise. There's a playful setting of different-styled tables, including seating under a Colombian Rattan tipi tent, complete the feel of let go alias laissez-faire. The cool bar blinks to New York loft style, think industrial bold. Waiters with hip suspenders and berets add a hint of French flair while lounge music fills the air. The décor is designed by David himself.

David Nataf - Owner

"Thoughts of finger licking dishes fill my mind thinking of my youth. The smell of fresh-baked croissants and chocolate bread hand made by my uncle's brother in law's father "the baker". The restaurant's kitchen fridge stuffed with the most exquisite dishes that my brother and I consumed secretly after a night out to the frustration of the chef. We were young boys eating away the night with foie gras and loup de mer



local branzino."

Tongue melting fondue and raclette, wood oven pizzas with fresh Emmentaler cheese and hand-picked champignons founded his foodie character. Add this to the time he spent at the grandparents' house in the vineyards with fruits, veggies, poultry, and game within hand's reach. What was missing was bought at the weekly farmers market. "I grew up with the farm-to-table concept."

Le Magic

The family magic is translated through David into Bohemian. Starters like Vitello Tonnato, le Ceviche, homemade Foie Gras Terrine or Escargots "A la Bourguignonne" tickle your taste buds. For entrees Whole Shrimps Flambe with Cognac, Grilled 10oz Angus Rib Eye Steak "Maître d'Hôtel" or Braised Lamb Shank ignite passion in your soul. Spicy Moroccan Mahi-Mahi Kebab with chickpea hummus and ratatouille crumble, Paella made with their own fish broth filled with chicken seafood and chorizo are other culinary delights but there is much more. Wines are imported directly from France regions, as is the champagne. Italian, Spanish, American and Australian choices complete the list.

Raving reviews on a continuous basis prove that Bohemian has got it! Every Wednesday there is Live Flamenco with Angela Croes, on Thursdays you will enjoy the beautiful live sounds of Angela's violin and on Friday's and Saturday's go with the beat of electro lounge. Live salsa music can be enjoyed on Sunday's. "Join our gypsy experience, travel with taste"

For reservations call +297 280 8448 or mail reservations@bohemianaruba.com or book through the website bohemianaruba.com.



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Aruba to me

ORANJESTAD — You are back and we would like to portrait you! By inviting you to send us your favorite vacation picture while enjoying our Happy Island.

Complete the sentence: Aruba to me is Send your picture with that text (including your name and where you are from) to: news@arubatoday.com and we will publish your vacation memory. Isn't that a special way to keep your best moments alive? Please do note: By submitting photos, text or any other materials, you give permission to The Aruba Today Newspaper, Caribbean Speed Printers and any of its affiliated companies to use said materials, as well as names, likeness, etc. for promotional purposes without compensation.

Last but not least: check out our website, Instagram and Facebook page! Thank you for supporting our free newspaper, we strive to make you a happy reader every day again.

For today we received an amazing story from **Alisson Braswell**. She wrote:



"Aruba to me is my second home. I have met so many friends and still meet more and more and every time I go. A lot of them are family to me. This trip was with family and Christmas gift to my daughter. We had a fabulous time as usual. We always stay at the Tamarijn Resort, the staff there are absolutely the best, the bartenders, waitresses, servers, entertainment staff, bellhops, golfcart drivers and management, they always go above and beyond and make our stay perfect. I also want to recognize a local who serves coconuts and delivers them right to a hotel, sit back relax at the pool and they will bring you this wonderful drink. The email for him is kokoparadisearuba@gmail.com. All you have to do is send him a email and he will deliver the delicious coconut to drink. Also want to thank a close a friend of mine



Jeremy Tromp for always showing me the bullie dogs on this island. This time he went above and beyond and organize for a bunch of the dogs to come see us

and we are so grateful for that. So Aruba to us is family and friends that always make our trip memorable".
"Love You All"
Braswell Family

Mindy Forman honored as Goodwill Ambassador

ORANJESTAD — Recently, Mr. Mario Arends had the great pleasure to honor a Loyal and friendly visitors of Aruba as Goodwill Ambassador at their home away from home. The symbolic honorary title is presented on behalf of the Minister of Tourism, as a token of appreciation to the guests who visit Aruba between 10-20-35 and more consecutive years.

The honoree was **Mindy Forman** from Kansas

Arends thanked her for choosing Aruba as her vacation destination and as her home away from home



for so many years together with the members of Reflexions

Top reason for returning

provided by the honoree were:

The people, safety of the island, beaches and variety of cuisines.

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Travellers' Choice 2020

Foundation “Ban uni man pa cria nos muchanan” needs a helping hand Feeding the needy children of Aruba every school day



ORANJESTAD — “Ban uni man pa cria nos muchanan” is a foundation whose goal it is to provide the needy children of Aruba with a breakfast every school day. A breakfast which consists of a sandwich and a drink (juice or milk). It is an independent foundation, receiving no subsidy whatsoever from the government.

The program started at the beginning of the 2001/2002 schoolyear as a community service project of the Facility Department of the Dr. Horacio E. Oduber Hospital, with 138 children. At the closing of the schoolyear 320 children were en-

rolled and this kept growing steadily each year. The 2019 schoolyear started with 650 children but as the schools reopened after the peak of the pandemic, the number of children grew to a staggering 794 children at the closing of the 2019-2020 schoolyear! These children are from 57 elementary schools all over the island. This number also includes about 70 children of the Traimerdia project, which is an after school program. For over 20 years the foundation has been providing breakfast to children of elementary schools but they are aiming on some day also be able to provide kindergartens and



high schools, seeing that there are many children in need.

The breakfast program is a sponsorship program; although the sponsors are encouraged to donate Fls 25.00 per month, the actual cost per child has doubled. Leaning towards Fls. 50.00 per month. Simple arithmetic shows that the current 450 sponsors are not enough. At Fls 50.00 per month it takes 800 sponsors to keep the program running – or a combination of sponsors and donations.

Due to the effect of the pandemic and the increase in consumption prices the foundation is expecting a big deficit for the

new school year of 2021-2022. If they don't manage to get sufficient funds they will have to reduce the amount of children to 600, meaning that at least 200 children won't be able to receive a breakfast this year and they would have to make the difficult decision in choosing who will stay on the list and who to remove. The foundation will keep working hard and do their utmost on getting these funds but they need the help of the community.

If you feel inspired by this article, do not just turn the page but act upon it. You can help and support this wonderful foundation by

making a donation to their bank account at the following banks: CMB 22559501, RBC 43.65.011 and at the Aruba Bank 2516290190.

For more information, or to receive a transcript of the Chamber of Commerce, the By-Laws or the latest Financial Report (2020-2021) of the foundation, please contact Mrs. Rachelle Roos at +297-527-4000 or Mrs. Felicia Halman at +297- 527-4750 or Mr. John Fun (President) at +297-527-4711 or at +297-699-4330.

Your support will help the children of this program at least have a breakfast every day. □

New Year's messages like fireworks

by Cdr. Bud Slabbaert

It is the season for it. It can show the difference between the message of a real Leader and the work of a ghostwriter. In most cases, you wouldn't even know, because of the lack of unique vibrant and fiery expressions that characterize the Leader in question. A New Year's speech should bring the audience to a new next level. They seldom do.

What is missing in all these New Year's messages? They should be planned like a firework show. Start with Saturn Sky Rocket for grabbing the audience attention, then on to Crazy Palm Fountains for the awe-effect, then a mellower with Strobing Thunder which offers a glittering effect, then a few bang mortars with Silverados, then a quieter with Dream Weaver and some Ground Spinners, and ending with some unexpected Paradise Heav-

en flareups.

Unfortunately, many New Year's addresses are like smoke bombs that are not designed to explode but rather make a humble sound when being ignited and then release bright white smoke, which is the color of innocence, and they often serve as smoke screens.

The Word of the Year is 'Resilience'. In fact, it is the trendy word for every occasion in every year. Buoyancy and tenacity are rarely used. Bullheadedness is never used although it could give a message a more unique flair. Without a doubt, the word Pandemic will be mentioned many times as if we cannot get enough of it. Most of the message will be about how encouraging the last months of the previous year were and how promising the next will be. Substantiating the promises is seldom done because

much of it would be no more than intelligent guessing. Let alone that sweeping activities or empyrean events will be included in the address.

Sigh..... And then there will be so many of these proclamations in one week, that it is almost like torture to read them all and therefore, assumably most people don't. They are more interested in celebrating rather than reading. Why not do something different? How about publishing it in the week of the Three Kings' Day when there is no overflow of manifesto. It commemorates the Three Wise Men bringing gold, incense, and myrrh which seems more substantial than what the average New Year's messages promise to bring. Isn't a Leader considered to a wise man who should bring more than that to his constituents?



By the way. You may not be aware of it, but the week before year's end is the official international week of the ghostwriters. In the second week into the New Year, the Ghostwriter of the Year Award should be presented. But that festive celebration won't happen because ghostwriting is a collaboration between leaders and ghostwriters whereby the latter don't get credit for the texting and are bound by a non-disclosure agreement.

New Year's Message? Why not just saying Happy New Year to yo'all and clink for a drink? □

Target CEO addresses omicron, wages and shopper habits

By ANNE D'INNOCENZIO
AP Retail Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Target is heading into the final stretch of the holiday season with lots of momentum. CEO Brian Cornell reports that holiday sales have continued to stay strong even amid worries about the new omicron variant. Like its big box rivals, Target has been able to defy industrywide challenges like labor shortages, inflation and supply chain snarls as the discounter keeps its shelves full and arms itself with a full seasonal staff of 100,000.

Under Cornell's stewardship, Target had been accelerating its online services such as curbside pickup and same-day services while sprucing up its stores well before the pandemic. The company raised its minimum wage to \$15 per hour in 2020, a commitment it pledged in 2017 and well ahead of many grocery rivals.

Still, Cornell predicts that supply chain issues will be around for several years, and he is monitoring to see how inflation will affect shopping habits at Target. The Associated Press recently interviewed Cornell, 62, on a wide variety of topics from omicron to inflation and wages as well Target's decision to no longer open its stores on Thanksgiving. His responses have been edited for clarity and length.

Q. How worried are you about omicron?

A. We're going to continue to make sure we work with the experts. We've had a dedicated team in place, a coronavirus task force team that we set up all the way back in January of 2020. And they're going to continue to guide us through the steps that we have to take to make sure we're focused on the safety of our team and the safety of our guests.

Q. Have you seen any changes in shopping behavior because of omicron?

A. I'm seeing guest shopping at our stores, shopping all of our categories. So I



Target CEO Brian Cornell is photographed at Target Plaza Commons in Minneapolis on Feb. 21 2017.

Associated Press

haven't seen any changes in the shopping patterns that we were expecting. But as you've seen us throughout the pandemic, we know we've got to flex based on the guests' needs so that if they suddenly decide to shift from using stores or going back to the same day services, we're ready for them.

Q. Which habits will stick when the pandemic is over?

A. I expect stores will continue to be really important going forward. And obviously, Americans have learned how to use their smartphones and tablets to shop online. And I think we're seeing all cohorts embracing both shopping in-store and using our same day services, and I think same-day services are going to be sticky for years to come.

Q. What do you think is driving the dissatisfaction

among retail workers?

A. I really can't speak for what's happening in other industries and other companies.

But I know our teams want a chance to have a rewarding career at a place where they want to work and it shows up in our engagement and retention numbers each and every week.

Q. How are you thinking about wages?

A. We did provide an extra \$2 for our teams on (holiday) weekends. And while \$15 is the mark we've set city by city, town by town, we evaluate what our

wage should be to ensure that we are competitive, we're attracting and retaining talent.

Q. Do you think Target will lose workers over the federal vaccine mandate?

A. It's really hard to tell at this point. And again, we want to make sure that we've provided an opportunity for our team members to have the options that are being prescribed. So whether it's vaccination or testing, we want to make sure we offer them those options and hopefully they continue to find Target a great place to work.

Q. What percentage of

Target workers are vaccinated?

A. We're pulling together that information. I don't have it yet, but we certainly will be in a position as we go into the first part of the year to understand exactly what percent have been vaccinated and what team members will be required to have weekly testing.

Q. Has inflation changed shopping habits at Target?

A. I think it's still just too early. We're going to learn a lot more about how the consumer reacts to inflationary pricing over the next six months. And do they choose an alternative brand? Do they decide to purchase one of our own brands? So, we'll watch that very carefully.

Q. When do you think the supply chain issues will ease?

A. I think this is going to be something that's going to take place over a number of years as we make the investments and really take our supply chain capabilities across the United States to another level. We have the inventory in the system in place to meet their needs. But it's the supply chain pressures that are not going to go away on January 1st. It's really driven by just incredibly strong demand and a very healthy U.S. consumer.

Q. Target announced that it will permanently close it stores on Thanksgiving. Why haven't other major retailers followed your lead?

A. I'm not sure what they're going to do, but we stepped back and said, 'What's the right thing for our team? What's the right thing for our guests?' And it was really clear to me how important it was to allow our team members to enjoy Thanksgiving with their friends and family. □



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CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 41 Violinist's stuff
 - 1 Ready for shipping
 - 6 Capital of Ghana
 - 11 Fighting go at
 - 12 "Two Women" star
 - 43 Got the lead out
 - 44 Had a go at
 - 45 Squalid
 - 46 Listens to

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Yesterday's answer

- DOWN**
- 8 Neil
 - 28 Sanders
 - 14 Wild party
 - 15 Originally called
 - 16 Swindles
 - 18 Bank acct. addition
 - 19 Road gunk
 - 20 Arthur's foster brother
 - 21 Treaty
 - 23 Barn section
 - 25 Torah cabinet
 - 27 Oscar winner Maher-shala
 - 28 Strain
 - 30 Closes
 - 33 Summer sign
 - 34 Sister, of sorts
 - 36 Workout unit
 - 37 Magic setting
 - 39 Early hour
 - 40 Kept in reserve
 - 1 Treat for
 - 2 Wise
 - 3 Neil
 - 4 "Dig in!"
 - 5 House chiller
 - 6 Montana neighbor
 - 7 Porter of song
 - 9 Close, as a freezer
 - 10 Nervous
 - 17 — Cruces
 - 22 Due
 - 24 Brewpub order
 - 26 Face on a half dollar
 - 29 Flop
 - 31 Said no to
 - 32 Shells out
 - 33 Weaving machines
 - 35 Compass point
 - 38 Served perfectly
 - 42 Bauxite, for one

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12-17

AXYDLBAAXR
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

12-17

CRYPTOQUOTE

G N L O D P T L B D X B N Z D O N U D

T L T B V D G I B . Z W B G Y T Q D W F

— B V D K V T Q D L N V N S G X T K I .

— V D L L K K N W L Y U T L

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: UNTIL WE GET EQUALITY IN EDUCATION, WE WON'T HAVE AN EQUAL SOCIETY. — SONIA SOTOMAYOR

EXPLAINER: The security flaw that's freaked out the internet



Lydia Winters shows off Microsoft's "Minecraft" built specifically for HoloLens at the Xbox E3 2015 briefing before Electronic Entertainment Expo, June 15, 2015, in Los Angeles.

Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — Security pros say it's one of the worst computer vulnerabilities they've ever seen. Firms including Microsoft say state-backed Chinese and Iranian hackers and rogue cryptocurrency miners have already seized on it.

The Department of Homeland Security has sounded a dire alarm, ordering federal agencies to urgently find and patch bug instances because it's so easily exploitable and telling those with public-facing networks to put up firewalls if they can't be sure. A small piece of code, the affected software often undocumented.

Lodged in an extensively used utility called Log4j, the flaw lets internet-based attackers easily seize control of everything from industrial control systems to web servers and consumer electronics. Simply identifying which systems use the utility is a challenge; it is often hidden under layers of other software.

The top U.S. cybersecurity defense official, Jen Easterly, deemed the flaw "one of the most serious I've seen in my entire career, if not

the most serious" in a call Monday with state and local officials and partners in the private sector. Publicly disclosed last Thursday, it's catnip for cybercriminals and digital spies because it allows easy, password-free entry.

The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, or CISA, which Easterly runs, stood up a resource page Tuesday to deal with the flaw it says is present in hundreds of millions of devices. Other heavily computerized countries were taking it just as seriously, with Germany activating its national IT crisis center.

A wide swath of critical industries, including electric power, water, food and beverage, manufacturing and transportation, were exposed, said Dragos, a top cybersecurity firm. "I think we won't see a single major software vendor in the world -- at least on the industrial side -- not have a problem with this," said Sergio Caltagirone, the company's vice president of threat intelligence.

Eric Goldstein, who heads CISA's cybersecurity division, said no federal agencies were known to have

been compromised. But these are early days.

"What we have here is a extremely widespread, easy to exploit and potentially highly damaging vulnerability that certainly could be utilized by adversaries to cause real harm," he said.

A SMALL PIECE OF CODE, A WORLD OF TROUBLE

The affected software, written in the Java programming language, logs user activity. Developed and maintained by a handful of volunteers under the auspices of the open-source Apache Software Foundation, it is highly popular with commercial software developers. It runs across many platforms Windows, Linux, Apple's macOS powering everything from web cams to car navigation systems and medical devices, according to the security firm Bitdefender. Goldstein told reporters in a Tuesday evening call that CISA would be updating an inventory of patched software as fixes become available. "We expect remediation will take some time," he said.

Apache Software Foundation said the Chinese tech giant Alibaba notified it of the flaw on Nov. 24. It took two weeks to develop and release a fix.

Beyond patching, computer security pros have an even more daunting challenge: trying to detect whether the vulnerability was exploited — whether a network or device was hacked. That will mean weeks of active monitoring. A frantic weekend of trying to identify — and slam shut — open doors before hackers exploited them now shifts to a marathon.

LULL BEFORE THE STORM

"A lot of people are already pretty stressed out and pretty tired from working through the weekend — when we are really going to be dealing with this for the foreseeable future, pretty well into 2022," said Joe Slowik, threat intelligence lead at the network security firm Gigamon. □

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24/7

Can your pet get COVID-19?



Can animals get or spread COVID-19?
(Associated Press Illustration/Peter Hamlin)

By **EMMA H. TOBIN**
Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Can your pet get COVID-19?

Yes, pets and other animals can get the coronavirus that causes COVID-19, but health officials say the risk of them spreading it to people is low.

Dogs, cats, ferrets, rabbits, otters, hyenas and white-tailed deer are among the animals that have tested positive, in most cases after contracting it from infected people.

While you don't have to worry much about getting COVID-19 from your pets, they should worry about getting it from you. People with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 should avoid contact with pets, farm animals and wildlife, as well as

with other people, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"If you wouldn't go near another person because you're sick or you might be exposed, don't go near another animal," says Dr. Scott Weese at Ontario Veterinary College.

Not all infected pets get sick and serious illness is extremely rare. Pets that show symptoms typically get mildly ill, the CDC says.

Some zoos in the U.S. and elsewhere have vaccinated big cats, primates and other animals that are thought to be at risk of getting the virus through contact with people.

This particular coronavirus most likely jumped from animals to humans in the

first place, sparking a pandemic because the virus spreads so easily between people. But it does not easily spread from animals to people.

Minks are the only known animals to have caught the virus from people and spread it back, according to Weese.

Three countries in northern Europe recorded cases of the virus spreading from people to mink on mink farms. The virus circulated among the animals before being passed back to farmworkers. □

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San Nicolas	584 5000
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Fire Dept.	115
Red Cross	582 2219

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Prof. Taxi	588 0035
Taxi D.T.S.	587 2300
Taxi Serv. Aruba	583 3232
A1 Taxi Serv.	280 2828

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American Airlines	582 2700
Avianca	588 0059
Jet Blue	588 2244
Surinam	582 7896

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Narcotics Anonymous
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LeVar Burton joins Scripps National Spelling Bee as host

By **BEN NUCKOLS**

LeVar Burton has been hired as host of the Scripps National Spelling Bee, giving the competition a celebrity headliner who's also a longtime literacy advocate as Scripps takes over production of the bee telecast.

Burton, who played Geordi La Forge on "Star Trek: The Next Generation" and was the longtime host of the children's educational program "Reading Rainbow," told The Associated Press ahead of Thursday's announcement by Scripps that he said yes immediately when approached about the hosting role. Burton comes from a family of educators and said the bee represents "the inspirational, aspirational ideal of education." "I want to normalize the pursuit of knowledge in this culture. That wouldn't be a bad thing, would it?" Burton said. "Not just making stuff up and calling it a fact. Achievement through knowledge, scholarship, putting in the work to gain the reward." Burton described the opportunity as one of many that have come his way



LeVar Burton arrives at the Star Trek Day celebration on Wednesday, Sept. 8, 2021, at the Skirball Cultural Center in Los Angeles.

since his unsuccessful public campaign to become the permanent host of "Jeopardy!" (He will also serve as grand marshal of the upcoming Rose Parade.) His bid to succeed the late Alex Trebek attracted plenty of goodwill online while the show's producers were roundly criticized for their decision to hire Mike Richards, who stepped down

shortly thereafter when his past insensitive comments were revealed.

The 64-year-old Burton described himself as an above-average but hardly distinguished speller who's as impressed by the bee winners as any other fan. He cheered for this year's champion, Zaila Avantgarde — the first African American winner in the

bee's history — and said the recent dominance of South Asian spellers should also be celebrated. Until this year, the bee had an Indian-American champion or co-champion every year since 2008.

"Zaila was a surprise, and a bit of an anomaly," Burton said. "I'm big for rooting for the underdog. As an underdog myself, I really identify."

Burton's hire comes at a time of transition for the bee, which has undergone several major changes since executive director J. Michael Durnil took over early this year. Scripps announced this fall it has ended its 27-year partnership with ESPN, which brought the bee to millions of viewers and promoted it like a major sporting event.

The bee will air next year on the Scripps-owned networks ION and Bounce and will stream online. According to Cincinnati-based Scripps, those networks are each available in nearly 120 million U.S. households. Burton's exact duties as host are to be determined. Various ESPN hosts served as lead announcer for the bee over the years but were only heard on the telecast and had no interaction with the spellers during the competition. Watching the bee on TV is different by necessity from watching it in person because the TV hosts can share with the audience the correct spelling of a word before it's spelled on-stage and analyze its tricky components. □

Associated Press

Facebook whistleblower Frances Haugen has book deal



Former Facebook employee Frances Haugen speaks during a hearing of the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Subcommittee on Consumer Protection, Product Safety, and Data Security, on Capitol Hill, Tuesday, Oct. 5, 2021, in Washington.

Associated Press

By **HILLEL ITALIE**
AP National Writer
NEW YORK (AP) — The former Facebook manager who startled the world this fall by leaking tens of thousands of internal documents and accusing her

former employer of caring more about money than about public safety has a book deal.

Little, Brown and Company announced Thursday that it had acquired a planned memoir, "offering a critical

examination of Facebook," by Frances Haugen. The book does not yet have a title or release date. Financial terms were not disclosed.

"During my time at Facebook I realized a devastating truth: almost nobody outside of Facebook knows what happens inside of Facebook. They operate in the dark," Haugen said in a statement.

"They win by keeping their systems closed without oversight or transparency, by shrouding their operations in secrecy and PR spin. I came forward because I believe that every human being deserves the dignity of the truth — and the truth is that Facebook buys its astronomical profits by sacrificing our safety. But it does not have to be this way — these problems are solvable. We can have

social media we love that also brings out the best in humanity. My hope is that this book will show us the way."

Haugen's prominence has been cited as a sign of a rising wave of Big Tech whistleblowers. In Senate testimony in October, Haugen alleged that the company had failed to make changes to Instagram even after internal research showed apparent harm to some teens and had not done enough to combat hate speech and misinformation. Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg has disputed her accounts, calling them a "false picture" of the company, but shared her view that the government needed to update its internet regulations.

A native of Iowa City, Iowa, Haugen is a data expert with a degree in electrical

and computer engineering from Olin College and a master's degree in business from Harvard. She already had 15 years of experience with tech companies, including Google and Yelp, before being recruited by Facebook in 2019 and joining in its civic integrity unit as lead product manager. Haugen and others have said that Facebook eliminated the civic integrity unit after the November 2020 election — Facebook says the unit was not eliminated, but integrated into a larger team. Haugen said she became convinced the company could not be trusted to "actually invest what needs to be invested to keep Facebook from being dangerous." She left Facebook in May, but not before spending weeks reviewing and copying documents. □

Jaguars fire Urban Meyer after 13 games, countless missteps

By MARK LONG

AP Pro Football Writer

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (AP) —

Urban Meyer never fit in the NFL.

His mottos. His methods. Even his moods seemed to go against what's considered normal behavior in a league filled with professionals and grown men. He rubbed just about everyone the wrong way: assistants, players and eventually his bosses.

Meyer's tumultuous tenure ended after just 13 games — and two victories — when the Jacksonville Jaguars fired him early Thursday because of an accumulation of missteps.

Owner Shad Khan made the move hours after former Jaguars player Josh Lambo told a Florida newspaper Meyer kicked him during practice in August. It was the latest black eye — adding to an already lengthy list of embarrassments — for the three-time national championship-winning college coach who failed miserably to make the transition to the NFL.

"After deliberation over many weeks and a thorough analysis of the entirety of Urban's tenure with our team, I am bitterly disappointed to arrive at the conclusion that an immediate change is imperative for everyone," Khan said in a statement. "I informed Urban of the change this evening. As I stated in October, regaining our trust and respect was essential. Regrettably, it did not happen."

Meyer joins former Atlanta Falcons coach Bobby Petrino as college coaches whose NFL careers flamed out in stunningly swift fashion. Petrino resigned in December 2007 to take over at Arkansas. He was 3-10 at the time.

Meyer went 2-11 in his partial season, and the Jaguars really started to unravel on the offensive side of the ball following the team's bye week. They averaged a measly 9.1 points in Meyer's final seven games, which ended with a five-game skid.

Offensive coordinator



Jacksonville Jaguars head coach Urban Meyer stands on the field before an NFL football game against the Los Angeles Rams Sunday, Dec. 5, 2021, in Inglewood, Calif.

Associated Press

Darrell Bevell will serve as Jacksonville's interim head coach for the final four games, beginning Sunday against Houston (2-11).

Meyer's biggest issues came off the field, where he tried to handle a professional team like he was on a college campus. He splashed slogans and catchphrases around the facility, instilled gimmicks in practice and repeated his misguided belief that coaches coach for players and players play for coaches. He brought in motivational speakers and kept blaming assistants for the team's mounting losses instead of the guys actually on the field.

One of Meyer's most damning decisions came following a Thursday night game at Cincinnati in late September. He chose to stay behind with family instead of flying home with his team and then got caught on video the following night behaving inappropriately with a woman at a bar in Columbus, Ohio. Khan publicly reprimanded Meyer then, saying he needed to regain the owner's trust and respect.

Bailing on his players showed just how out of touch Meyer was with NFL norms. And it was just one of many head-scratching choices for the 57-year-old coach who found success at every college stop: Bowling Green (2001-02), Utah

(2003-04), Florida (2005-10) and Ohio State (2012-18). Meyer simply never made the proper adjustments to the pro level.

Lambo's claim seemingly proved too much for Khan, who two days earlier said he didn't want to make an impulsive decision on the coach's future.

"What's different about this thing is you have losses and you have drama," Khan said then.

The Jags had way more drama than victories.

Lambo provided the latest when he told the Tampa Bay Times that Meyer kicked him while he was stretching at the start of a practice. Lambo, the team's place-kicker to open the season, said he told Meyer "don't you ever (expletive) kick me again" and said the coach responded, "I'm the head ball coach, I'll kick you whenever the (expletive) I want."

Meyer released a statement through the team denying the incident happened the way Lambo described it.

"Josh's characterization of me and this incident is completely inaccurate, and there are eyewitnesses to refute his account," Meyer said.

Lambo said he reported the kick to his agent, who contacted the Jaguars' legal counsel the following day.

"Jaguars legal counsel indeed acknowledged and responded immediately to the query made by Josh Lambo's agent Friday, August 27, 2021," the Jaguars said in a statement. "Counsel offered to speak with Josh, or to assist Josh in speaking with coaching or any other football personnel, if he was comfortable with her sharing the information. Any suggestion otherwise is blatantly false." Lambo was released after he missed his first three field-goal attempts to start the season.

Lambo's allegation came on the heels of an NFL Network report which said Meyer created tension with multiple run-ins with players as well as assistants he allegedly called "losers." Citing unidentified sources, the report detailed a heated exchange between Meyer and veteran receiver Marvin Jones that stemmed from Meyer criticizing receivers by saying they weren't winning enough one-on-one matchups or getting enough separation. "I would just say this: There was something that was brought to my attention that I didn't like too well," Jones said Wednesday, his first public comments since the report was published Saturday. "I approached him about it and we talked and we handled it like grown men. And that's all I

have to say about that."

Jones denied threatening to leave practice over the argument.

"I mean, shoot, when you lose, you're always going to be the center of attention in a negative way," Jones said. "That just is what it is. That's all I have to say."

Other issues for Meyer:

— He hired strength coach Chris Doyle in February despite accusations of racist behavior and then had to let him go a day later because of a pending lawsuit. — Jacksonville was fined \$200,000 and Meyer docked \$100,000 on July 1, a punishment that stemmed from an early June practice in which the league deemed receivers and defensive backs had too much contact during 11-on-11 drills.

— Meyer signed 2007 Heisman Trophy-winning quarterback Tim Tebow to play tight end, an experiment that ended with Tebow looking lost in the preseason opener against Cleveland.

— Meyer held a fake QB competition between Trevor Lawrence, a generational prospect, and Gardner Minshew in training camp. Meyer and general manager Trent Baalke traded Minshew to Philadelphia, where he's a backup to Jalen Hurts.

— The NFL Players Association launched an investigation after Meyer said vaccination status factored into the team's roster decisions.

— He repeatedly mishandled running back James Robinson, allowing the team's most consistent offensive player to get benched twice following fumbles and botched trying to explain why Robinson got pulled and how long he remained on the sideline.

All the drama became too much for Lawrence.

"I do think that has to change and that's something that we need to work on for sure," Lawrence said Wednesday. "You can't always be in the headlines. You just got to go play football, and that's where we're trying to get, and I have no doubt we'll get there." □

U.S. sports leagues cope with COVID-19 outbreaks amid variants

By ERICA HUNZINGER

AP Sports Writer

DENVER (AP) — U.S. sports leagues are seeing rapidly increasing COVID-19 outbreaks with dozens of players in health and safety protocols, amid an ongoing surge by the delta variant of the coronavirus and rising cases of the highly transmissible omicron mutation.

Both the NBA and NHL have had to postpone games over the last month with so many players sidelined, and the men's basketball teams at Tulane and the University of Washington have seen cancellations due to outbreaks in their programs. The NFL won't postpone games, saying forfeits could be in play instead.

The difficulties for U.S. sports come on the heels of soaring infections in Europe, where English Premier League officials called off three soccer matches in four days due to the virus and the German government temporarily restricted Bundesliga arenas to 50% attendance or 15,000 fans. But don't expect the U.S. leagues to return to "bubble" play or shut down for a couple of weeks to let things subside.

"The way our system is set up now, an infection triggers a chain of events and that leads to confusion, disruption, mayhem. But from a medical respect, these people are mainly vaccinated and not going to go to the hospital," said Dr. Peter Chin-Hong, an infectious disease specialist at the University of California, San Francisco.

"We're in a very different world from a year ago. ... It's not too bad for young, healthy athletes," Chin-Hong added.

And there's too much financially at stake for leagues to consider shutdowns, given the millions upon millions of dollars lost when sports took a hiatus last year. There's also fan pressure to take into account.

"The short answer is money. It's what's driving (the leagues') decisions to continue to play, even in the



Vancouver Canucks goaltender Braden Holtby (49) wears a protective face mask to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 as he congratulates Thatcher Demko (35) on the team's win over the Toronto Maple Leafs in an NHL hockey game Thursday, March 4, 2021, in Vancouver, British Columbia.

Associated Press

face of these outbreaks," said Nola Agha, a professor of sports management at the University of San Francisco.

"I don't think they will reduce the number of fans or shut down the entire season," she continued. "I think they will continue to do the best they can within local health department guidelines, which might reduce the number of fans."

In Canada on Wednesday, the country's largest province, Ontario — home to the NBA's Toronto Raptors and the NHL's Toronto Maple Leafs and Ottawa Senators — set a cap of 50% of capacity for large gatherings such as professional sports events.

So far the NHL has had the most postponed games for a league in North America this season, with 10. The Senators were first in mid-November, followed by the Calgary Flames and the Carolina Hurricanes this week. On Wednesday alone, the Nashville Predators added six players and six staff members to the health and safety protocols, and Boston Bruins captain Patrice Bergeron went in as well.

The omicron variant is mostly responsible for the uptick

in NHL cases, according to a person with direct knowledge of discussions between the league and the NHL Players' Association, but it does not account for all positive tests. The person spoke on the condition of anonymity because the talks were private.

The person also said the NHL is reintroducing enhanced COVID-19 protocols including restricting players to their hotels while on the road and bringing back daily testing through at least Jan. 7.

Interim coach Derek King of the Chicago Blackhawks, who were supposed to play the Flames this week, said the team has been reinforcing with players the importance of social distancing, hygiene and avoiding crowds.

"Just really knuckle down, because we don't want to be one of those teams that's got to rearrange their schedule because we have COVID," King said.

The NBA also has several stars in COVID-19 protocols right now, including the Milwaukee Bucks' Giannis Antetokounmpo and the Brooklyn Nets' James Harden. As of Wednesday afternoon, 33 players — about 6.5% of the league — were

in the protocols, with 17 of those playing for either Chicago or Brooklyn.

The Bulls had games postponed Tuesday and Thursday because they didn't have enough players available, while Brooklyn played with an NBA-minimum roster of eight on Tuesday.

That same night, when Golden State Warriors guard Stephen Curry set a record for career three-pointers at New York's Madison Square Garden, NBA commissioner Adam Silver wasn't in the audience — both he and deputy commissioner Mark Tatum have been undergoing daily testing after attending an event hosted by Toronto president Masai Ujiri, who tested positive soon after.

"Like the rest of the country, and as was predicted by our infectious disease specialists, we have seen an increase of cases around the league," NBA spokesman Mike Bass said Wednesday, adding that the league will continue to be guided by science and data and cooperate with the Players Association.

The NBA says 97% of players are vaccinated and just over 60% have received booster shots.

Preeti Malani, the University

of Michigan's chief health officer, an infectious disease expert and a member of two Big Ten COVID-19 advisory committees, said boosters will be "essential" to avoiding schedule disruptions.

"The biggest thing we can do, whether it's sports or school or workplace, is to be highly vaccinated. ... That means being boosted in addition to the primary series," Malani said.

The NFL is perhaps fortunate in that most of its games are played outdoors, so there's less risk for fans.

But the league is having its worst outbreak in terms of players on the reserve/COVID list: Eighty-eight tested positive Monday and Tuesday, and several more were added Wednesday including eight on the Washington Football Team. The L.A. Rams have 16 on the list.

It's a small percentage for a league with about 2,200 players between active rosters, injured reserves and practice squads. But omicron could cause that to rise quickly.

New York Giants coach Joe Judge said his players are now wearing masks indoors and are spaced out more in meetings.

"Anyone who's been involved in any kind of a close contact or test at this point has either been removed or separated from the team, and they're in virtual meetings," Judge said. The NFL Players Association has raised alarms for months about the league moving from daily to weekly testing, which hampers detection of outbreaks.

Chin-Hong of UCSF said they're right to be concerned and the NFL should rethink the policy.

"(Testing) once a week is so 2020," he said. "We have the technology to do it several times a day."

On the college level, there have been some other cancellations besides the ones involving Tulane and Washington: Cleveland State men's basketball; Iowa women's basketball; and a postponed Cal Bears football game. □